

Kathmandu -- With the financial support of USAID and the technical assistance of Mercy Corps, the Backward Society Education (BASE) Youth Awareness Central Committee held its second general assembly in Nepalgunj from June 13 to 15, 2008.

Representatives from 820 village youth clubs that are implementing USAID and Mercy Corps' "Youth Initiatives for Peace and Reconciliation" project in five districts of mid and far western Nepal through BASE were in attendance. The assembly involved workshops focused on livelihood, HIV/AIDS, and the role of youth for peaceful change, as well as a cultural program, street drama and an art competition to promote peace.

Keynote speaker USAID Mission Director, Beth S. Paige, attended along with Mercy Corps Country Director, Mr. Keith Polo, and other NGO/INGO representatives. Ms. Paige acknowledged the key role youth have played in Nepal, "USAID is proud to support this assembly. We applaud the role youth have had in community reconciliation and encourage them to continue to help build the new Nepal." In his remarks, Mr. Polo also praised the contributions of youth, "Over the past two years, the 820 youth clubs have proven themselves to be driving forces for peace and development. We salute them on their hard work and encourage them to continue to aim high in regard to all the future priorities they have identified, such as youth job creation, HIV/AIDS awareness building, and gender equality."

The assembly began with a peace rally at 1 PM on June 13 which proceeded through town and culminated in a mass gathering at Balmandir at 2 PM. A youth declaration was announced at the end of the three day program.

The "Youth Initiatives for Peace and Reconciliation" project supports youth committees through BASE that have over 30,000 youth as general members across five districts. These groups engage youth in peace and reconciliation by organizing activities that offer creative alternatives to conflict, develop new skills, and promote self-confidence.

The groups have allowed youth across southern Nepal to organize sports and cultural events for their own and neighboring communities, providing a non-threatening forum for youth from different areas to interact. The groups also plan and undertake valuable community service including planting trees, improving roads and assisting in dispute resolution - on a volunteer and community-driven basis.